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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0428
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 2441
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 1754
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 1546
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHMCSUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000478

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA, DS/DSS/ITA, AND S/CT/ALLAN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [KCRM](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: TERROR (AND TERRORISM) ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

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11. (SBU) Summary: On February 4 Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader L.K. Advani cancelled a dozen campaign events scheduled for the coming month after National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan warned him about terror threats to his personal safety. The BJP did, however, hold its kick-off rally, sharply criticizing Congress for being soft on terror. Congress responded rhetorically the following day and also extended the ban on the Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), a student group believed to have links with Islamic terrorism. A war of words has ensued with neither side gaining a short-term edge. As the country gears up for national polls, however, the BJP may come out ahead on the issue given its consistent hardline stance, its espousal of the Hindutva security and sovereignty issues, Congress's suspension of the BJP's anti-terrorism legislation, and simply because it is not the party in power during the most recent attacks. End Summary.

BJP Accedes to Terror Advice from Narayanan

12. (U) On February 4 National Security Advisor M.K. Narayanan persuaded BJP leader L.K. Advani to temporarily curtail his campaign schedule due to terror threats. Neither side released specifics of the meeting, but BJP Vice President Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi told the press Narayanan relayed "credible intelligence about a security threat to Mr. Advani." According to NDTV, Narayanan told Advani that arrested Harkat-ul-Jehadi Islami (HuJI) operatives had confessed to targeting the BJP leader. Last week the media reported that the Home Ministry reviewed security arrangements for both Advani and Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi after intelligence suggested Dawood Ibrahim was targeting the pair at the behest of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence.

13. (U) The BJP had planned over a dozen rallies for Advani during the next several weeks in advance of national elections. But after a day deliberating Narayanan's warning, the party cancelled the bulk of the events. Only the February 6 inaugural in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, as well as

rallies in Karnataka and Delhi remained scheduled. After Jabalpur, the next big rallies had been scheduled for Rampur, Lucknow, Faizabad, and Varanasi - all in Uttar Pradesh and all the scenes of recent terrorist attacks.

Politics: BJP Campaigns on Terror, Congress Responds

¶4. (U) At the February 6 kick-off in a security-laden Jabalpur, Advani sharply criticized the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) for not doing enough to combat terrorism. The BJP has tagged Congress as "soft on terror" and has made terrorism a main plank in its campaign against the UPA. Congress spokesman Abhishek Singhvi hit back the next day, citing the previous National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government's failure to prevent the 2001 Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) attacks on the Indian Parliament and Red Fort. That same day, the UPA extended its ban on SIMI for two more years. The group has been banned since 2001; its members have reportedly provided logistical support to groups such as LeT and HuJI.

¶5. (SBU) In another sign that the BJP intends to highlight terrorism as a key theme in the coming national and state elections, the party's legal cell organized a "combating terrorism" meeting on February 8 in New Delhi. Several prominent BJP leaders, including General Secretary Arun Jaitley, Spokesman Ravi Shanker Prasad, Vice President Bal Apte and Delhi BJP chief Harsh Vardhan called for tough laws to fight the terrorist threat. They accused the UPA of "minority appeasement" which they blamed for the party's lack of political will to face the menace. The BJP plank on terrorism will focus on three themes: Pakistan-inspired Islamic terror; China-supported separatist terrorism in the north east; and the Maoist/Naxalite insurgency threat in a broad stretch of India extending from Bihar to Andhra Pradesh.

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¶6. (SBU) On January 31, Congress MP Raashid Alvi told Poloffs he did not think the terrorism issue would be a winner for the BJP. The Muslim MP welcomed the issue and said Congress was fully prepared to vigorously refute the BJP's arguments. Congress spokesman Singhvi's quick rejoinder to Advani's Jabalpur speech shows that the Congress Party is ready with its talking points on terrorism and will hit back whenever the BJP raises the issue.

MEA Admits Heightened Security Atmosphere

¶7. (SBU) At a February 5 meeting with PolCouns, Americas Joint Secretary, Gaitri Kumar, mentioned a "sense of heightened alertness," several times. The comment followed a particularly tense January 26 Republic Day holiday in the capital. Rampur, site of the January 1 attack on a Central Reserve Police Force base, lies only 100 miles from Delhi.

Terror Plays Two Roles in Campaign

¶8. (U) Comment: Clearly, whatever threat information Narayanan conveyed to Advani, the BJP took it seriously. And while Advani continued his political attack on Congress over terrorism, he did not suggest the warning was politically motivated. Terrorism now appears to be playing an ever increasing role in Indian politics, not only as an electoral issue to be debated, but also as a very real threat on the campaign trail. Any future attacks will add fuel to the BJP's arguments and come at the expense of the sitting UPA government. End Comment.

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